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ABSTRACT

This book argues that understanding the current state of academic teaching, and the study of religion in higher education, requires familiarity with the individuals and organizations that have shaped the field and, more importantly, with the arguments used to justify religion as a field of academic inquiry. The primary focus of the book is on the rationale that Protestant ministers and faculty employed to justify their work, and the narrative follows the ideas of mainline Protestants who conceived of religion as an academic subject, and the academic administrators who accepted that concept. The text is divided into three periods. The first, 1870-1925, was a period during which the first research universities were founded, and a period when dogmatic and sectarian religious scholarship adjusted to claims made on behalf of the truth-discovering capabilities of science. During the second period, 1925-65, Protestant religious scholarship was less sectarian, and religious studies blossomed as an academic field. In the third period, which covers the decades after 1965, it is noted that the civic faith of mainline Protestants, which had been inclusive, culturally respectable, and learned, once again was perceived to be narrow, intolerant, and sectarian. A concluding chapter examines where religious studies are headed for the future, suggesting that it may be time for academics to stop trying to secure a religion-friendly university. (Contains approximately 600 references.) (CH)

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